

Modern World History Online

Achebe, Chinua

Perhaps [Nigeria](#)'s most popular author, Achebe (born Albert Chinualumogu Achebe in 1930) began his career as a journalist at the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. There he developed the character Okonkwo, the central figure of his first and most successful novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958). The book follows the story of Okonkwo as he struggles against the changes colonialism has exacted on his traditional Igbo culture. The novel garnered tremendous international acclaim and has been translated into 45 languages, becoming one of the most widely read novels by an African writer and establishing Achebe as Africa's leading literary figure.

Achebe followed the success of *Things Fall Apart* with three novels that trace the history of the Igbo through colonialism and up to 1966, when a bloody military coup led to the fall of Nigeria's First Republic. These novels, *No Longer at Ease* (1961), *Man of the People* (1966), and *Arrow of God* (1967), cemented Achebe's reputation as a chronicler of Nigeria's troubled colonial past and uncertain future as an independent nation.

The same year as the publication of *Arrow of God*, ethnic and political tensions exploded into the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70). Achebe's Igbo people seceded from Nigeria, declaring the independent Republic of Biafra in 1967, prompting a bloody conflict that badly destabilized the country. Achebe served as the Biafran minister of information during the war, living in the new Biafran capital of Enugu until it fell late in 1967.

Afterward Achebe traveled throughout the world, attempting to draw attention to the Biafran cause and the atrocities committed against them by Nigerian troops. His experiences during the war led to the poetry collection *Christmas in Biafra and Other Poems* (1973), for which he was awarded the British Commonwealth Poetry Prize. The war, however, discouraged Achebe greatly, and more than a decade passed before he could write another novel.

After the war ended in 1970, Achebe became director of publishing companies in Enugu and [Ibadan](#). He also taught extensively at the University of Nigeria and at a number of universities in the United States. In 1987 he published *Anthills of the Savannah*, a novel in which, contrary to his previous works, he expressed hope for Nigeria's future. After a car accident in Nigeria that left him paralyzed from the waist down Achebe moved to the United States, where he accepted a teaching position at Bard College. He continued to write, including the essay collections *Home and Exile* (2000), *The Education of a British-Protected Child* (2009), and *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (2012). Achebe also published a number of children's books and short story collections.

In 2007 Achebe received the Man Booker International Prize for lifetime achievement. He died on March 21, 2013, at the age of 82.

Further Information

Ezenwa-Ohaeto, *Chinua Achebe: A Biography* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997)

Ode Ogede, *Achebe and the Politics of Representation: Form against Itself, from Colonial Conquest and Occupation to Post-independence Disillusionment* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2001).

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